

10-29-1918

Letter from May-ling Soong Chiang, 1918-10-29, Tientsin, China, to Emma Mills

May-ling Soong Chiang

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Letter from May-ling Soong Chiang, 1918-10-29, Tientsin, China, to Emma Mills

Transcription

Hotel de la Paix

Tientsin

29 October, 1918

Dearest Dada:

Here I am in Tientsin. And having such a whopping good time. As you know, my sister Mrs. Kung and her family came up a month ago to go to Shansi, but Mr. Kung has some business here that needed and needs his presence here: so they stayed on. Then my brother came up on business three weeks ago, & stayed a couple of weeks and then had to return to Shanghai last week to attend to some business there. So he stayed in Shanghai two days, and returned here, and this second time I came up with him. Mother never would have let me come were it not for the fact that I have been terribly ill, and just then my brother John also had the influenza and is now home from school to keep her company.

I have been here four days, and "have been on the go" every minute since I [page break] came. Sister has so many friends here that we are motored, tea, dined, and theatred every minute of our waking hours. We never get to bed before 1:30 A.M.

We have Mr. Kung, my sister, the two children, three servants, our uncle, my brother and I here all in the hotel. We have a wing all to ourselves, and can make any amount of noise without disturbing anyone. As you see from the name, this is a French hotel, and the food is perfectly marvelous! The first three days, the change of climate was so invigorating that I almost stuffed myself to death - I am getting to be a little more normal

now. I have met some awfully interesting people, both foreigners and Chinese. One of Mr. Kung's friends who has a huge place wants all of us to move over and visit him. But [page break] of course we would not!

I have been to a Chinese theatre, a Japanese theatre, an opera, and a "movie" each night. Tonight we are going to a "charity affair" after dining with the Lees. We are going to tea with Miss. Grimes. Like a nut, I only brought up a valise; and so I am having some "rush order" clothes made at one of the French stores.

We expect to leave Tientsin in a few days, and then shall take in Peking, and probably Shih-Cha-Tsong and finally Taku in Shansi, my sister's home. I shall visit her for only a few days, for Mother expected me back in a week. She did not want me to go to Shansi, as that is a very long trip, and she does not know I am going. I will wire her when I get there.

The trip from Shanghai to Tienstein is 40 hours on the train. Both my brother and I [page break] had a state room apiece: so I just sprawled on my berth, and read most of the time.

It seemed good to see mountains again, for Shanghai is very flat and monotonous. We stopped off a couple of hours at Nanking, the old capital to see the sights. It was very mountainous and picturesque. We had to cross the river to get to the other station, and while on the boat, some beggars came in another little house boat. They had a long pole and a bag like the velvet collection box in the church at one end. It was so unique that I had to give them something in spite of my convictions.

The land from Tientsin to Shanghai is well cultivated, and irrigated. There was not a single lot left to waste except for the grave-yards. Each family usually has a plot of land on which are graves and

trees which are supposed to keep the dead company, and from which the family would not be willing to part for anything. You remember about the funereal cypresses in Virgil? Well, that's the same idea. The plot of land is usually [page break] oval in shape [co..] [diagram of tree and grave].

Another interesting thing I noticed was that in the ponds where the water-lilies grow, I saw men and women in wooden tubs gathering the lily roots. They reminded me of the story of "The Water Babies."

Whatever one would & could say against the Huns, I have to acknowledge that they have done well in planting trees all along the railroad tracks. You know, the Germans were the chief instrument in building this road.

On our way up, we saw a lot of soldiers both Northern and Southern troops. They seem on the whole well dressed: but of course they lack the martial of the foreign troops which only experience and rigorous discipline could give them.

The trains are divided into three classes, and the third class occupants would buy huge cakes which look hard as bricks at the various stopping places. I watched one man eat six of these cakes about the size of this piece of paper and an inch in the thickness. [page break] Wouldn't I have died of dyspepsia if I had taken even one of them?

Tientsin is an interesting place all divided up into Concessions, the English, the French, the German, Austrian, Italian, Chinese, the Japanese etc. Each has its own municipal force. They have a trolley line here, and you can ride from one end of town to the other for three pennies! The city is much less crowded than Shanghai, the houses are all spread out. It reminds one of an overgrown boy whose trousers are having a hard time to keep up with the lanky legs. The houses here are of a different type of architecture

from that of the Shanghai houses. For one thing, they have the Italian air rather than the American or English. The race course is miles long and is beautiful.

The rickshaw coolies here are far better dressed than those in Shanghai, and here I have not seen a single beggar whereas in Shanghai, it is full of them. The difference in dialect between North and South is [page break] so great that a Southerner and a Northerner cannot carry on a conversation. But of course the written language is the same.

I have been practicing my French on the hotel people. They seem surprised that I can speak it. The stores here in the French Concession carry on all their business in French. My nephew and niece are so cute that they attract an awful lot of attention. As my sister never gets up before 11, and as I am always up by seven, I take the children out quite a bit. We go to the bund to watch the ships come in, and it's lots of fun.

This is such a scatterbrained letter that I hope you can make sense out of it. My sister is up, and is calling me so I must close. With love

Daughter.

Hôtel de la Paix

Tientsin

29 October, 1918.

39

Dear Dada;

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such a whopping good time. As you know, my sister
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that needed and needs her presence here: so they
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terribly ill, and just then my brother John
also had the influenza and is now home
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 that we are visited, read, dined, and
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 We never get to bed before 1.30 A.M.
 We have Mr. Kemp, my sister, the
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 brother and I here all in the hotel. We
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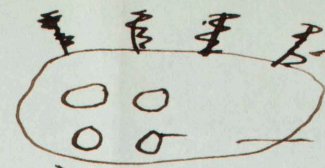
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